

MEANING, NATURE & DEFINITION OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

Meaning

Man is a social animal. He cannot live in isolation, because he is not self-sufficient and the natural instinct to survive compels him to live a collective life. According to Aristotle, this collective life necessitates a political mechanism of rules, regulations and leadership. An organized society needs some system to make and enforce rules for orderly behaviour in society. This led to the evolution of a political system with elaborate governmental institutions & procedures in each society. Therefore, man is also a political animal. Political science is one of the oldest subjects of study of this political life of man.

Nature

Politics is not only a mere institution of governance but also a mechanism for achieving societal goals. Political science is a social science concerned with the theory and practice of politics and the description and analysis of political systems and political behaviour. It includes matters concerning the allocation and transfer of power in decision making, the roles and systems of governance including governments and international organizations, political behavior and public policies.

**Political science is thus a study of the state in the past, present and future;
of political organization, political processes and political functions;
of political institutions and political theories.**

Political science has several subfields, including: political theory, public policy, national politics, international relations, human rights, environment politics and comparative politics.

Origin

The antecedents of Western politics can trace their roots back to Greek thinkers Socrates, Plato (427–347 BC) and Aristotle (384–322 BC). The studies were philosophy oriented. Plato wrote The Republic and Aristotle wrote the Politics. **Aristotle** is known as the Father of Political Science. He is famous for his statement “Man is a political animal”. The word ‘politics’ is derived from the Greek word ‘polis’, which means a city-state.

During the height of the Roman Empire, famous historians documented the rise of the Roman Republic, and the organization and histories of other nations, while statesmen like Julius Caesar, Cicero and others provided us with examples of the politics of the republic and Rome's empire and wars. The study of politics during this age was oriented toward understanding history, understanding methods of governing, and describing the operation of governments.

During the Middle Ages, the study of politics was widespread in the churches and courts. Saint Thomas Aquinas was an important political thinker of this period.

During the Italian Renaissance, Niccolò Machiavelli established the emphasis of modern political science on direct empirical observation of political institutions and actors. His famous book, ‘The Prince’ is a guide to modern realist politics. Other famous men of this period were Thomas Hobbes, John Locke & Rousseau (Social contract theory). Important figures in American politics of this period were Alexander Hamilton, Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson.

In ancient India, the antecedents of politics can be traced back to the Rig-Veda, Samhitas, Brahmanas, the Mahabharata and Buddhist Pali Canon. Chanakya (c. 350-275 BC) was a political thinker in Takshashila.

He wrote the Arthashastra, a treatise on political thought, economics and social order, which can be considered a precursor to Machiavelli's The Prince. It discusses monetary and fiscal policies, welfare, international relations, and war strategies in detail, among other topics. Manusmriti, dated to about two centuries after the time of Chanakya is another important political treatise of ancient India.

Stages of Evolution

- (1) philosophical: concerned with ends and purposes
- (2) institutional: concerned with political organization
- (3) behavioural: concerned with motivations and mechanism of human behavior
- (4) pluralistic: concerned with the interaction among groups and organizations
- (5) structural: concerned with the connection between the individual and the community
- (6) developmental: concerned with the process of growth, industrialization and change and the impact on government forms and policies.

Importance of the study of political science (Scope)

The study of politics is both humanistic and scientific, and is centuries old. Aristotle called it the "queen of the sciences". Today's political research involves highly scientific and rigorous attempts to understand human behavior and world events. Political scientists provide the frameworks from which journalists, special interest groups, politicians, and the electorate analyze issues.

Political science as a discipline deals with various aspects like:

- a. *Study of state and government*- it deals with the nature and formation of the State and tries to understand various forms and functions of the government.
- b. *Study of associations and institutions*- in organized way the fundamental problems of political science include, first, an investigation of the origin and the nature of the state, second an inquiry into the nature, history and forms of political institutions and third, deduction, therefore, so far as possible, of laws of political growth and development.
- c. *Study of national and international problems*- modern demands of defense of territory, representative government and national unity have made political science not only the science of political independence but that of state sovereignty also.
- d. *Study of political behavior of man*- it may be said that the character of political science in all its parts is determined by its basic pre-supposition regarding man.
- e. *Study of the past, present and future of development*- political science attempts to explain the meaning and the essential nature of the state and deals with the laws of its progress and development within itself and in relation to international organizations and other states.
- f. *Study of the concepts of power, authority & influence*- with the behavioural revolution the central topic for study has become the study of power. Consequently the scope has widened to include new aspects like political socialization, political culture, political development and informal structures like interest and pressure groups.

Definitions

1. From the **traditional point of view** we may define political science as “the study of the state and government in all their manifestations, aspects and relationships”. In this sense, politics can be domestic, national, federal, municipal or international.

These early definitions of political science dealt generally with state and government.

- a. J.W. Garner: “Political Science begins and ends with the state”; “Politics is the study of State & Government”.
- b. R.G. Gettel: “Political Science is the historical investigation of what the state has been, an analytical study of what the state is and a political, ethical discussion of what the state ought to be”.
- c. Leacock: “Political science deals with government only”.
- d. Paul Janet: “Political science is that part of the social science which treats the foundations of the state and the principles of government”.

2. In the beginning of the 20th century there developed a new way of looking at political science. This new approach is known as **behavioural approach**. The main thrust of the new view is the treatment of politics **as an activity and a process**.

In this context, new definitions emerged.

- e. Harold Laswell: “Politics is the study of influence and the influential” or “the study of the shaping and sharing of power”
- f. David Easton: “Politics is the authoritative allocation of values.”
- g. Catlin: “Political Science is the study of the act of human and social control”.
- h. Andrew Heywood: “Politics can be defined as an activity through which people make, preserve and amend the general rules under which they live.”

Modern political scientists consider politics as a process centering around power and influence. They are concerned with not just the state and the government, but also the study and evaluation of political activities, political power, processes and non-governmental institutions.

Perspectives on politics

Politics as a human (social) activity: Simple things like our opinions, perceptions of rights & wrongs, competing needs, conflicting interests ultimately leads to a system of rules for conflict resolution and cooperation. The inescapable presence of diversity and scarcity ensures that politics is an inevitable feature of human condition. Adrian Leftwich (What is Politics?) finds politics is the heart of all collective social activity, formal and informal, public and private, in all human groups, institutions and societies.

Andrew Heywood (Politics 2007) sees Politics as follows:

(1) *Politics as art of government*: Here politics is the classic activity of making and enforcement of collective decisions. The state as the central concept of politics has a long history. The state has several specialized structures, institutions, officer and roles. It has the monopoly of coercive power. In these circumstances, it was natural to understand politics as the study of the state. Until the Second World War, the state served as the chief organizing idea of politics.

(2) *Politics as public affairs*: The meaning of politics can be stretched beyond the narrow realm of government to a broader conception of 'public life' or 'public affairs', because of its 'public' character. Aristotle said 'man is a political animal'. Rousseau and JS mill supported this outlook.

(3) *Politics as compromise & consensus (study of interaction among interest groups)*: According to this, politics has a wider scope. Politics is seen as an act of conflict and cooperation among individuals and various groups in the society to secure values like liberty, equality, justice, welfare etc., and to organize and use a public power for this purpose (Bernard Crick). Politics is thus an interaction between man & society resolving conflicts through conciliation and negotiation instead of violence. Both the liberal and Marxist views of politics study it as a part of this social process. As a result of this, non-formal institutions like pressure groups, public opinion, interest groups, political parties etc. became the subjects of politics.

Thus, within its fold, there are discussions on theories of state origin, functions, sovereignty, liberty, rights forms and organs of government, representation, political parties, pressure groups, public opinion, ideologies, and international relations and institutions.

(4) *Politics as the study of power*: After rejecting politics as the study of state as insufficient, modern thinkers tried to find the axis of politics and they found it in the concept of power. The new understanding of politics was that it is a struggle to share or influence the distribution of power, whether between states or among the groups within the state. There are two advantages to study politics from the point of view of power- firstly, it focuses attention on process rather than on legal abstractions of the state. Secondly, this approach pays greater attention to man as the basic unit of analysis. Politics became directly concerned with the needs, interests and goals of men that give rise to power-relationship among them and ultimately lead to a public policy.

In short there are three forms of power: political, economic and ideological. Political power s concerned with the maintenance of law and order and dispensing justice through reward and punishment.

Politics as the study of power (in detail)

Though identifiable with terms like influence, coercion, force, domination, authority, control and the like, the term 'power' has its own meaning. Power is a relation. While power is coercive, influence is persuasive authority is the legitimate aspect or power and force is manifested power.

Power is "the ability to determine the behaviour of others in accord with one's own wishes". The power theory of politics is as old as the Greeks, though it has assumed much importance in recent times. Power consists fundamentally of relationships, of subordination, of dominance and submission, of the governors and the governed and the study of politics involves the study of these relationships.

In other words, the study of politics is concerned with the description and analysis of the manner in which power is obtained, exercised and controlled, and the purpose for which it is used, the manner in which decisions are made, the factors which influence the making of these decisions and the context in which these decisions are made.

Power can be exhibited in three dimensions: political, economic and ideological.

Political power: it belongs to the state and is manifested through the organs of the government like legislature, executive, military, judiciary, police, bureaucracy etc. Power is shared by political parties, pressure groups, elites, factions, leaders etc. Power exists in all political processes, however democratic they may be.

Liberals say that power is dispersed in society and that it changes hands often. Marxists hold a different viewpoint. According to them power is concentrated in a class and only revolution can make it to change hands.

Economic power: finds its place in the form of ownership and control of national wealth, as well as means of production and distribution. Economic power and political power are mutually complementary.

Liberals say that it is diffused and hard work determines the degree of economic power one can gain. Marxists again hold the view that economic power is also concentrated in the hands of a few and they manipulate it to gain political power.

Ideological power: resides in the prevailing ideas acceptable to the people. Ideology literally means a set of ideas in which people have unquestionable faith and they also strive to put them into action. The dominant class will also try to propagate and implement ideas that are congenial to their interests, whether economic or political. They may use all available media, elites, intellectuals, religious institutions, educational systems, associations and institutions to achieve this while oppressing counter ideologies.

Authority: Power with legitimacy. Max Weber classifies it into three: traditional, charismatic & legal-rational or bureaucratic.

MAJOR APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

In simple terms, an approach may be defined as a way of looking at and then explaining particular phenomena. Approaches and methods to the study of politics are many and most of them seem to overlap each other in varying measures. From Plato and Aristotle in the remote past to Laski and Laswell in the present we have a very large number of great thinkers, theorists and analysts who have made an attempt to understand and explain political reality in their own ways, with their own approaches.

I. THE TRADITIONAL APPROACH

The sum total of approaches and methods employed in political enquiry by thinkers from Plato to the 20th century constitute the traditional approach. It consists of a collection of approaches used in the classical and institutional periods. These approaches include the idealistic, philosophical, ethical, normative as well as historical legal-institutional, comparative and analytical.

During the classical period the ethical basis and moral purpose of the political community was described, discussed and emphasized in logical, consistent and convincing ways. The problems of ends and means, the ideal and desirable loomed large. During the institutional period a historical, analytical and comparative accounts of the various constitutional and governmental systems were made.

Characteristics:

- a. emphasis on the study of formal institutions to the neglect of political processes
- b. focused on the Western European political system
- c. adopts a country-by-country approach with little attempt to identify similarities between countries
- d. little attention given to the analysis and development of systematic generalizations about the political phenomena
- e. lack of concern for the development of theories through collection and analysis of data
- f. neglect of the findings of other social sciences and non-political determinants of political behaviour
- g. holds value judgments on what ought to be the nature of political structures and institutions

Philosophical approach- The oldest approach to the study of politics. Here the study of the state, government, power and man as a political animal is linked with the pursuit of certain goals, morals and truths (standards of rights & wrongs). Hence the thinkers of this age move closer to ethics and try to advice the rulers. Plato, Aristotle, Rousseau, Kant, Hegel and others belong to this frame of reference.-speculative & not objective.

Historical approach- The feature of this approach is to throw focus on the past or on a selected period of time as well as on a sequence of events to explain the origin and growth of any political institution. If political theory has a universal and respectable character, its reason should be traced in the affirmation that it is rooted in historical traditions.

Legal approach- Here the study of politics is linked with the study of legal or juridical processes (constitutions) and institutions created by the state for maintaining political organization. In this connection, we may refer to the works of Bodin, Grotius, Hobbes and Dicey. They imply that the state as an organism of growth and development cannot be understood without a consideration of those forces and factors that constitute the domain of law and justice.

Institutional approach- Here the study lays stress on the formal structures of a political organization like legislature, executive and judiciary. (impartial account of political reality). Since the emphasis is on the superstructure and the infrastructure of political system, this approach is also known as 'structural approach'. This approach neglects individual behavior, role of power, violence, political movements, wars & revolution in politics. Ignores the role of informal groups & processes in shaping politics.

Criticisms:

- a. the historical approach ignores the study of contemporary society
 - b. the philosophical approach is speculative and abstract and ignores the actual political phenomena
 - c. the institutional approach ignores the political behaviour of the individuals and sociological environment
 - d. ignores the international problems
 - e. legal approach covers only one aspect of the people's life
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II. THE BEHAVIOURAL APPROACH

It is a post- second world war development evolved by the American Scholars (American Political Science Association & Chicago School). By the close of the 19th century political thinkers understood that they had neglected and paid little attention to understand and analyse the actual working of governments and political institutions.

Factors that contributed to development of behaviouralism:

- a. They felt dissatisfied with the achievements of conventional political science.
- b. The failure of the discipline to predict both the World Wars and the associated socio-political changes including revolutions in Russia and China and the independence movements in many colonies.
- c. To contain the spread of communism.
- d. Financial assistance from organizations like Ford Foundation.
- e. Growth of new social science research methods.

The scope of political science now widened to include the organizational structure, the process, decision making and action, the politics of control, the policies and actions, electoral process, patterns of political interaction etc. Graham Wallas tried to interpret political phenomena in terms of psychological forces rather than form and structure. Catlin emphasized on an interdisciplinary approach. **Charles Merriam**, who initiated the Chicago School of behavioural revolution, can be truly regarded as the intellectual godfather of this approach.

Emphasised on:

- a. individual behaviour instead of political institution as the basic unit of analysis
- b. scientific outlook and objectivity (observation, classification and measurement of data)
- c. methodological revolution: use of scientific methods (survey, case study, interviews, socio-psycho analysis etc)
- d. interdisciplinary approach
- e. its commitment to the formulation of empirical theory.

Sociological approach- this approach emphasizes that social context is necessary for the understanding and explanation of political behaviour of the members of the community. Terms like political socialization, political culture, and political sociology are the contributions of this approach. Harold Lasswell, AF Bently.

Psychological approach- a study of politics is made by writers like Graham Wallas, Charles Merriam, Robert Dahl etc in a way so as to deal with the role of emotions, habits, sentiments, instincts, go etc that constitute essential elements of human personality. Psycho-analysis of political leaders reveals significant knowledge about politics.

Economic approach- matters relating to the production and distribution of goods have an economic character. But as their regulation is done by the state, they are very much involved in the process of politics. The prominent schools of liberalism, socialism and communism emerged because of the divergent interpretations of the role of the state in regulating economic matters.

David Easton's Assumptions and Objectives of Behaviouralism

(Right Fold Path) (Intellectual Foundation Stones):

1. *Regularities*- there are certain uniformities in political behaviour which can be generalized in terms of theories explaining and predicting political phenomena
2. *Verification*- knowledge in order to be valid should include only those things which have been empirically tested
3. *Technique*- researcher should be conscious about his methodology
4. *Quantification*- imprecise qualitative judgments have no place in political science.
5. *Values*- value and facts are two separate categories and should be kept analytically distinct. Scientific study should be value neutral.
6. *Systematisation*- theory and research should be closely interrelated
7. *Pure Science*- the theoretical understanding of the political phenomena may lead to an application of this knowledge to the political activity and thus will become a pure science
8. *Integration*- interdisciplinary approach

Contributions: a.structural-functional analysis, b.input-output analysis, c.decision making approach, d. communication framework model

Criticism: It is true that as a result of the utilization of the behavioural approach the scope of political science has widened and the nature of the discipline improved in understanding and explaining the political reality. In limited and specialized fields, the behavioural movement achieved significant results. But with its over emphasis on quantification of data the movement suffered from sterility and irrelevance. It evaded problems of large scale change.

III. POST-BEHAVIOURAL APPROACH

Towards the end of the 1960s a powerful attack was made on the behaviouralist position by David Easton out of deep dissatisfaction with its findings. Behaviouralism was eager to develop new research methods and techniques about political phenomena so that in political science also theories may be developed like natural sciences but in the effort they divorced political science from philosophy, history, law etc. In a

world of crisis, doubts were raised about the adequacy or relevance of the modern research methodology of political science, especially when the political scientist was unable to cope with contemporary social and political problem. Behaviouralism failed to solve any problem of the world such as threat of nuclear war, hunger, poverty, disease, cold war, arms race etc.

Post behaviouralism is both a movement and intellectual tendency. Post-behaviouralism is future-oriented. This new development is then a genuine revolution, not a reaction, not preservation, a reform not a counter-revolution. It is just a continuation of the former, ie., behaviouralism taking it to a higher stage.

Post-behaviouralism should not be taken as traditionalism. Both are highly critical of behaviouralism. The difference between the approaches lies in the fact that traditionalism discounted the validity of behavioural approach and sought to revive the classical tradition of political science. In contrast, the post-behaviourlists accepted the achievements of the behavioural era, but at the same time sought to propel political science towards new areas. An important feature of the post-behavioural trend should be traced in taking political science towards, what is called, 'policy science'.

Post behaviouralists argued that political scientists should be more concerned with values, with issues of justice, freedom, equality and with political activity. It is not appropriate to take a value-free, academic detachment from public policy and political reform.

The two main demands of post-behaviouralism are '*relevance*' and '*action*'. David Easton who had at one stage enumerated eight main characteristics of behaviouralism, now came out with seven major traits of post-behaviouralism as the '**credo of relevance**'. They can be summarised as the following:

- a. Substance must have precedence over technique- it may be good to have sophisticated tools of investigation but the most important point was the purpose to which these tools were applied. Unless the scientific research was relevant and meaningful for contemporary urgent social problems, it was not worth being undertaken.
- b. Emphasis should be on social change and not social preservation- the behaviouralists had confined themselves exclusively to the description and analysis of facts, without taking sufficient care to understand these facts in their broad social context.
- c. Political science should not lose touch with brute realities of politics- the behaviouralists concentrated their efforts on abstraction and analysis. Then the vital question arose if political scientists did not find the solution of the ills of society and needs of mankind, then what was the use of the research?
- d. Political science should not be value-free- there is no denying the fact that the values played a significant role in political research and the values were the propelling force behind knowledge. The post-behaviouralists firmly hold the view that if knowledge was to be used for right goals, value also had to be restored to their proper place.
- e. Political scientists must protect humane values of civilization
- f. Post-behaviouralism emphasizes action in place of contemplative science- according to David Easton, "to know is to bear the responsibility for acting and to act is to engage in reshaping society".
- g. Urgent need to politicize the profession- once it is admitted that the political scientists and intellectuals have a positive role to play in the society, then in order to achieve that goal it becomes inevitable that all the professional associations as well as the universities must be politicized.
- h. Mad craze for scientism should be discarded

- i. The study should not only be related to the past and present, it should also be future-oriented

Traditional	Behavioural	Post-behavioural
Inter-relates facts and values	Separates facts and values	Facts and values tied to action and relevance
Prescriptive and normative	Non-prescriptive, objective and empirical	Humanistically problem-oriented
Qualitative	Quantitative	Quantitative and qualitative
Concerned with irregularities and regularities	Concerned with uniformities and regularities	Concerned with regularities and irregularities
Focus on European countries	Focus on Anglo-American countries	Focus on third world countries

IV. MARXIST APPROACH

The Marxist approach to political analysis is primarily associated with the contributions of Karl Marx. The significance of the Marxist approach is due to its emphasis on production and distribution of goods in assessing social changes and political revolutions. This is quite different from traditionalism and behaviouralism. Marx said, “the mode of production of the material means of existence condition the whole process of social, political and intellectual life”.

The three primary aspects of Marxism are:

- a. Dialectical and materialistic concept of history
- b. Critique of capitalism (base & superstructure, surplus value & class struggle)
- c. Advocacy of proletarian revolution

Using these three concepts, Marxism treats State as an instrument of exploitation and oppression by one class over the other. Also struggle for power constituting the base of politics should be studied in the context of the conflict between two opposing classes.

While Karl Marx and Frederick Engels opened up a new approach to study the State, Marxist thought was developed into a major concern by later Marxist scholars in Europe and USA. Marxian approach gained prominence after the Second World War when it took up the study of the politics of underdeveloped and developing areas in the context of imperialistic exploitation. Neo-Marxism led by the Frankfurt School and western thinkers like Georg Lukacs (*History & Class Consciousness*), Antonio Gramsci (*Prison Diary*), Louis Althusser (*Reading Capital*) etc have greatly contributed to the development of this Marxist social theory.

The significance of the Marxist approach is in the fact that it calls for a deeper scrutiny of the meaning and nature of politics. It not only emphasizes the relevance of class contradictions in the functioning of the State but also provides Socialism-Communism as the solution to the problems. Therefore, this approach not only lays out the problems but also delivers the solution. This deterministic character is unique to Marxist approach.

Today the Marxist approach has established a parallel stream of theories and definitions to all basic political concepts like origin of State, rights, development, feminism, identity politics, concepts of liberty, equality & property etc.